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## **JUDICIARY OFFERS ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN PATERNITY DISPUTES**

On July 8, 2004, the Family Court of the First Judicial Circuit (O`ahu) will launch a new, mandatory informational program for individuals dealing with custody and visitation disputes in paternity cases. The program, called the Kids First Morning Program, will be held at 8:00 a.m. every Thursday at the Circuit Court building at 777 Punchbowl Street.

Recent statistics reflect a need for this type of program. In 2002, 34% of the total number of births in the State -- or 5,938 children -- was attributed to unwed mothers. About 1,500 paternity cases are filed annually in the O`ahu Family Court.

The new Kids First Morning Program is specifically designed to deal with cases where paternity has been established, and the unmarried parents are disputing custody or visitation rights. Program attendance is limited to the biological or adjudicated parents. New partners or spouses and extended family members may not attend.

Parents will learn how to minimize the negative effects of separation on their children and receive information on mediation, counseling and treatment programs, and child development. The program is designed to teach parents how to make decisions that are in their children's best interests.

The Kids First Morning Program is based on the O`ahu Family Court's original Kids First Evening Program. However, only divorcing parents with minor children may attend the evening program.

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